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SUBJECT: TOGO: EX-MINISTER BOKO DISCUSSES POLITICAL
DIALOGUE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reason
1.5 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Togo's ex-Interior Minister Francois Boko said on August 16 that he hoped the political dialogue in Ouagadougou between the Togolese government and opposition would be productive, but he believed the process would result only in cosmetic changes designed to improve the international acceptability of the Faure regime, now seeking legitimation after a period of consolidation. Boko said that the Faure regime, the French government, and elements of the opposition asked him to join in the dialogue, but he refused, saying that he preferred a role outside the process that would allow him to engage in constructive criticism. Boko said the Faure regime was determined to establish itself firmly before the May 2007 French presidential elections and the almost certain departure from power of President Chirac. Boko commented ironically that his actions in speaking out against the Faure government have led to his isolation among many Africans and to limited job opportunities. END SUMMARY.

Political Dialogue

¶2. (C) At an August 16 meeting, former Interior Minister of Togo, Francois Boko, said he was following closely the political discussions between Togo's government and members of the opposition, taking place in Ouagadougou. He said that the dialogue would likely result in superficial changes that would make the Faure government more acceptable to the international community and would facilitate the resumption of foreign aid, one of the regime's main priorities. In Ouagadougou, Faure would not agree to reforms that would challenge his hold on power but might, for example, name an associate (NFI) of UFC opposition leader Gilchrist Olympio as Prime Minister, and place other opposition figures in position of ostensible authority.

¶3. (C) After having spent the past 18 months consolidating its hold on power, the Faure regime was now in "Phase II," an effort to gain legitimacy, Boko observed. He noted that Faure was succeeding to some degree in giving the impression that he would govern Togo in a more enlightened fashion than had his father, but Boko cautioned that this only reflected Faure's more sophisticated approach to crafting his image, using modern public relations tools, and following his counselors' advice.

¶4. (C) Boko said he had been approached by the GOT, members of the opposition, and the French to join in the Ouagadougou talks, but had declined. These approaches consisted of appeals to his patriotism and his experience, but Boko said he preferred for the moment to remain outside the process and to establish his family in France. He believed that he could serve better as an "outside, constructive critic" than as a member of the GOT, should the GOT follow up on its suggestion that it would offer him a government job if he joined the political dialogue. "If Faure gets everybody into the

process, who would be left to serve as an independent critic?" he asked. He said that his role would not be destructive. "I want to hold them to whatever they decide in Ouagadougou. If they decide to investigate the hundreds of killings at the time of the 2005 elections, and they don't do so, I'll be in a position to call this to public attention," he said.

15. (C) Boko said he did not want to give the impression that he was against the Ouagadougou talks or that he discounted their value. The opposition, he said, had to take what it could and make the most of it. "Even if opposition members in the government have only symbolic powers, they can still make a difference, and at the very least 'slow the damage,'" he said. He nonetheless reiterated that the Faure regime intended to co-opt as much of the opposition as it could, and the opposition, "tired" after so many years in the wilderness, was probably more pliable than one would want. With a government integrating significant opposition members, Faure could credibly claim "reform," and international pressures against him could subside, Boko said. This was what Faure hoped to achieve.

Togo and France

16. (C) Boko said that both the Faure regime and the French wanted rapid measures that would further entrench the Faure regime in power. Progress in Ouagadougou would allow the French to receive Faure honorably during his planned September 2006 visit to Paris, and reconciliation with the opposition and the formation of a "national unity government" before the May 2007 French presidential election would do much to ensure a stable, more palatable Faure regime in place before Chirac's almost certain exit from the French political

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scene. Given France's long engagement with Togo and the Gnassingbes, and its desire not to "lose" another of its former colonies, France wanted a secure long-term relationship with Togo, Boko said. From Togo's perspective, firming up Faure's status while Chirac was still in office was a high priority, as none of his probable successors would likely view the Faure regime, the Gnassingbe clan, and France-Togo relations as favorably as has Chirac.

Still Being Hassled Over Cote d'Ivoire

17. (C) Boko commented briefly on the continuing repercussions of the bombing incident in Cote d'Ivoire on November 6, 2004, when, as Togo's Interior Minister, he ordered the arrest of the Belarusian personnel involved in the attack but then had them released, purportedly after the GOF's intervention, and later had to testify before a French judge investigating the matter. (A recent series of new press reports again highlights Boko's role in this affair.) Stressing that "I was the good guy" in responding to the bombing, Boko said that he continued to receive thinly veiled threats from those associated with Faure, to the point where he had again requested GOF assistance and protection. He indicated that the present threat level was lower than it had once been, but still worrisome, and he appeared comfortable with the GOF response. He predicted that the GOF would never completely investigate the Cote d'Ivoire bombing and the French role in not pursuing the Belarusians -- "this touches on a matter of state, and the French won't permit an investigation that would embarrass France."

Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't

18. (C) Without regretting the actions he took against the Faure regime, which led to his exile in France, Boko said that his anti-Gnassingbe stance continued to complicate his life. He said that his several applications to work at international organizations had not, so far, led to any prospects. He noted the irony -- African countries that have embraced the Faure regime do not want to support his

applications because they view him as a troublesome dissident who did not remain loyal to Eyadema (with whom a number of African despots have much in common), while Western countries opposed to Eyadema and Faure view Boko as damaged goods because of his service as an Eyadema minister. Boko confided that he was seeking to set up an independent law office in Paris, separate from the French law firm now employing him. His new office would be loosely affiliated with the French firm (with which he remains on excellent terms personally), but he and the French firm agreed that it was best that they end their official ties -- his presence there was hurting the firm's business, which depends on many clients from many sectors seeking opportunities across Africa.

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